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Stevenson High School seniors will graduate June 6 during a ceremony at Welsh Ryan Arena at Northwestern. This story profiles a senior who has made a difference at the school.

When Stevenson senior David Kuriniec graduates June 6, he will leave behind a lasting impression.

Two bricks -- one etched with his name, the year and the word "Success" and the other etched with the words "Ability Making a Difference," -- have been placed in the sidewalk under the wheelchair button at the main entrance by the circular drive at Stevenson.

They were his graduation presents from his aide Inga Butteltmann and teacher Joyce Leong.

## **Accessibility**

But his most lasting impression will be the awareness he has raised at the school for those with disabilities, and the improvements in access and mobility he has helped secure.

Kuriniec, a resident of unincorporated Deerfield who has cerebral palsy, began making an impact the moment he arrived at Stevenson as a freshman and had difficulty accessing the west building from the old sky bridge because there was no mechanism to open the doors.

He spoke to the buildings and grounds department, and a button to open the door was added, shortly before Thanksgiving 2001.

"That was the first thing," he said.

Then there was the circle drive entrance, where students enter through a double set of doors. A button was in place on the outside, but there wasn't a button in the area between the two sets of doors.

"You'd walk in the first set, which was accessible by button, and you'd be caught in between the two sets of doors," he said.

Kurinieć, with great tact, pointed out to administrators and the school board ways in which it was difficult for someone with a disability to gain access and get around, Superintendent Tim Kanold said.

"David did a great job of bringing it to the school's attention," he said.

A button was placed between the sets of doors at the circle drive entrance, restrooms were upgraded and entryways were made easier for students with disabilities to get through.

"He's just such a wonderful advocate for students who are physically handicapped," Kanold said. "He's going to be a great politician some day."

Kurinieć said he drew inspiration for his efforts from following the case of Casey Martin, the golfer who was denied use of a golf cart in pro tournaments by the PGA even though he has a rare circulatory condition in his right leg that made walking difficult.

An accomplished golfer who played with Tiger Woods on the 1994 Stanford University golf team, Martin filed a lawsuit under the Americans with Disabilities Act against the PGA. The U.S. Supreme Court eventually ruled in favor of Martin.

Kurinieć began to think about ways to level the playing field in all aspects of life for people with disabilities.

"I really feel that people with disabilities can be wage-earning, contributing members of our society if things are made accessible to them," he said.

He has met with U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, of Highland Park, to discuss issues including seating in movie theaters and increasing the number of driver's license testing facilities in Illinois that test drivers who have to use hand controls because they can't use their legs.

"He's a natural leader," Kirk said. "I don't think there's a pessimistic bone in his body."

## **Inspirational**

Kirk said he draws inspiration from Kuriniec. Kirk said he was aboard Air Force One with President George W. Bush on their way to Illinois, and the president asked Kirk if there's anyone he should write to. Kirk's immediate response was "David Kuriniec."

"It was my way of saying you inspire me," Kirk said, adding he expects Kuriniec will achieve great success for people with disabilities on a national scale.

Kuriniec will attend Lake Forest College in the fall and plans on studying political science and history. Then, it's on to law school and into the political arena, he said.

"This government was created to help people," he said, adding what he's doing is not just for him or people with disabilities. For example, things like buttons to open doors can benefit mothers who are pushing strollers, he said.

At Stevenson, where Kuriniec was an active member of the Political Action and Diversity Clubs and the National Honor Society, faculty and the student body alike are thinking about the successes he's had at school.

"I see the struggles of students with various kinds of disabilities," said school nurse Peg Cucci.  
"David has taken us a long way down the road to accessibility for all students."

"This kid is going to go far," said Principal Dan Galloway.

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